

CHICKEN POX

Chickenpox is a common communicable disease in children. It is caused by a varicella-zoster virus. A generalized, itchy, blister-like rash, with mild fever and fatigue, characterizes the illness. The rash appears as red bumps, which quickly become blistered, ooze and then crust over. New spots continue to appear for about 3 to 4 days. The spots will dry up and scab over before falling off.

Contagiousness:

Direct contact, droplet, or airborne spread of vesicle fluid or secretions of the respiratory tract of chickenpox cases transmit chickenpox from person to person. Handling articles that are freshly soiled by the infected person's lesions also transmit it. The incubation period is from 2 to 3 weeks, usually 13 to 17 days.

Treatment:

Persons with chickenpox should discuss treatment options with their health care provider. Cool baths and calamine lotion may help relieve itching. Skin must be kept clean to prevent bacterial infection of the skin.

School Exclusion Guidelines:

A person is communicable for as long as 5 days but usually 1-2 days before onset of rash and continuing until all bumps are crusted (usually 5 days). Children must be excluded from school for at least 5 days after bumps appear or until all crusts are dry.

Avoid exposure of women in early pregnancies that have not had chickenpox and/or varicella vaccine. Pregnant women should check with their doctor if exposed to chickenpox virus. Immunosuppressed individuals are at risk and may develop life-threatening disease.

Prevention:

Chickenpox is vaccine preventable. Once a person has been infected with chickenpox, the virus remains (without symptoms) in the body's nerve cells. In some people, the virus reactivates later and is called shingles or zoster. The virus shed in the blisters of shingle's rash can cause chickenpox in a person who has not had it, if that person had direct contact with the infected shingles blisters.